
Implementing the Concept of Sustainable Development in Russia: Developing the Childhood Infrastructure

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Abstract:

The purpose of this work is to find the relevant differentiation of quality and accessibility assessments for the services provided by infrastructure institutions, and satisfaction with living environment by families of different types from urban and rural areas of Russia. To obtain an objective picture and evaluate the implementation of the Concept of Sustainable Development in Russia consistent with the interests of families with children, one should consider not only the official statistics, but also the results of sample surveys of target groups. Integrating information from different sources allows obtaining a more reliable and completing assessment of the development of social infrastructure for families with children.

The social infrastructure should be developed according to the needs and wishes of the citizens. The findings of the study are based on an analysis of official statistics for the period of 2005-2014 and the results of the representative sample study "Comprehensive monitoring of the population's living conditions". To examine the study assumptions, relevant statistical analysis methods have been applied the differences in distribution of answers between urban and rural families have been analyzed using the Pearson's coefficient.

This study has proven that the estimates given by respondents living in urban and rural areas are much less different from the statistics for the types of relevant settlements. Reducing the number of institutions that provide families that have children with healthcare, education and leisure services has not shown negative assessments of respondents yet, but the social infrastructure should be developed in accordance with the needs and wishes of the citizens.

Keywords: Childhood infrastructure, sustainable development, welfare of children, satisfaction with living conditions.

JEL Classification: H50, H54.

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1. Introduction

The most distinctive feature of the modern times is the special attention given by the global community to the problems of creating a comfortable environment for children. By signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international acts for ensuring the rights of children, the Russian Federation has expressed its commitment to participate in the global efforts to create an environment that is comfortable and supportive for childhood (Order of the President of the Russian Federation No. 761 dated June 1, 2012). The most important is that the childhood strategy is effective when supported by the strategy of long-term sustainable social and economic development.

A sustainable development strategy known as the Millennium Declaration was adopted in September 2000 at the UN Summit attended by 185 heads of states and governments. The 2001 “Millennium Development Goals” (Resolution adopted by the General Assembly without reference to a Main Committee (A/55/L.2)) contained 8 goals, 18 objectives and 48 indicators for measuring the achievement of the goals. All the objectives were formulated considering the level of development of the countries and adapted to their national conditions, if necessary, and their achievement was planned by the end of 2015. Both the improvement of living standards and infrastructure changes were recognized as important.

In 2015, 193-member states of the United Nations had reached a consensus on the final document “Transforming Our World: An Agenda for Sustainable Development for the Period to 2030”, and in September 2015, at the UN Headquarters in New York, the heads of states and governments endorsed the Development Agenda for the post-2015 period.

New goals and objectives were complex and indivisible and ensured the balance of all three components of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. 17 global goals were approved, in particular, to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote the sustainable agriculture, promote a healthy lifestyle and well-being for all people at all ages, provide inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all, ensure gender equality and empower all women and girls, create the sustainable infrastructure, provide with openness, security, viability and sustainability of cities and settlements, etc., (Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).

In Russia, while implementing the Millennium Development Goals, a specific situation has developed. On the one hand, it makes a significant contribution to the development goals realization. Thus, the Russian financial participation in this process has grown significantly — from \$100 million in 2004 to over \$700 million in 2013. The Concept of State Policy of Russia's Participation in Promoting International Development adopted in April 2014 is designed to adapt the Russia's

participation in achieving the goals of sustainable development (Clark, 2015; Kovalenko *et al.*, 2016; Guskova *et al.*, 2016; Medvedeva *et al.*, 2016).

In Russia there is the Expert Group chaired by the Federal State Statistics Service under the Interdepartmental Working Group on issues related to climate change and sustainable development. A roadmap for increasing statistical capacity to monitor the achievement of the sustainable development goals has been approved. At the same time, Russia still does not solve many economic and social problems, it lags the leading countries as to the quality of life of its population and the social infrastructure's development. With this in mind, the Millennium Goals have been adapted for Russia (Report on human development in the Russian Federation 2010 Millennium development goals in Russia: a consider the future). Thus, an important place belongs to solving problems related to relevant protection of families and childhood. Such tasks include provision of access to education; involving socially vulnerable groups in the education and socialization; providing access to pre-school education for children from families with low incomes and those living in rural areas, and reducing the impact of adverse socio-economic factors on health and life expectancy.

To achieve the development goals, including the formation of supportive environment for children, one should have an objective view of the changes taking place in this sphere, to find out the direction in which the social infrastructure is developing and what factors must be considered to meet the goals. The social infrastructure for children is the whole system of objects (buildings, structures, facilities) required for the life support of children, as well as organizations, regardless of their forms of ownership, that deliver social services to the population, including children, and whose activities are carried out to ensure appropriate life, healthcare, education, recreation and rehabilitation, develop children, meet their social needs (Federal Law No. 124 FZ of July 24, 1998). The development of the social infrastructure for children means expanding the network and improving the activities of institutions that render services to children, families with children in health, education, leisure, recreation, culture and sports. However, the statistics do not always give a complete picture. Significant differentiation in the evaluation of services by different socio-demographic groups can be determined based on the results of selective studies.

2. Methods

A significant place in the implementation of the goals of sustainable development in Russia belongs to formation of the qualitative and branched social infrastructure. On the one hand, the analysis of statistical data indicates the relative development of the infrastructure for children in almost all areas of their life. The dynamical analysis of data over the past 10 years allows identifying certain trends in development, largely determined by the demographic processes and the state social policy. However, these statistics allow characterizing the situation, but not for a

differentiated assessment for various socio-demographic groups, e.g., families with children of different ages living in different types of settlements. Additional data are required to analyze the availability of the social infrastructure for urban and rural families. The use of statistical materials and large sample surveys allow for a more objective assessment of the situation, including the satisfaction of service users.

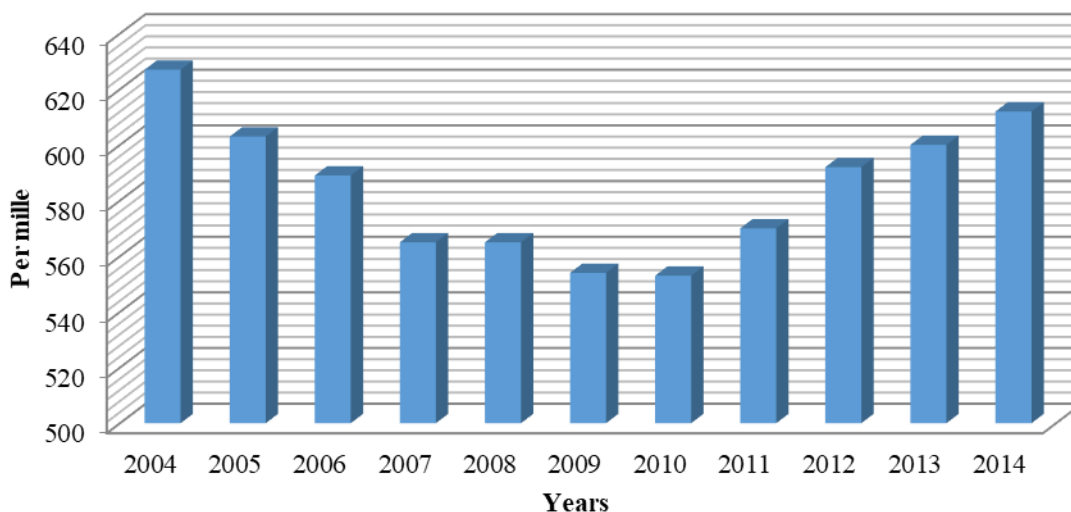
Our conclusions are based on the results of the Comprehensive monitoring of the population's living conditions conducted by Rosstat in 2014. The sample covers 3,278 people living in different types of settlements with and without children under 18 years. To confirm the assumption of presence or absence of significant differences in respondents' answers regarding their satisfaction with the quality of the infrastructure in their places of residence, nonparametric criteria have been used that are less demanding on the nature of the distribution. This is especially important when the qualitative indicators measured in the ordinal or nominal scale are subject to analysis.

3. Results

In respect to the infrastructure elements, special attention is traditionally paid to education, and the problem of accessibility of educational institutions is defined as one of the most pressing for families with children. Characteristics of the pre-school education infrastructure indicate the development of network of pre-school educational institutions against the trend of their enlargement. Over the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of institutions involved in educational programs for pre-school education, as well as childcare (from 47,200 organizations in 2004 to 51,000 in 2014). However, such increase is due to not only the development of new pre-school institutions, but also to a change in the accounting procedures for the services provided. Since 2014, a few organizations involved in pre-school educational activities has been seriously increased: now they include not only institutions providing educational and pedagogic services, but child minding too (Methodological Notes, n. d.; Faizova *et al.*, 2015). This approach has resulted in some formal increase in the number of institutions, but many of them work part-time and do not provide educational services.

There is a shortage of places in pre-school institutions (Figure 1). Despite the actions taken (the Federal Targeted Program for the Development of Education for 2011-2015 and the State Program of the Russian Federation "Development of Education for 2013-2020"), in 2014 there was still observed a shortage of places, i.e. only 612 for 1,000 children 1-6 years old (even less than in 2004). The situation in urban areas is much better than that in the rural ones. The network of the institutions in cities is much more developed. Thus, there were 660 places per 1,000 children aged 1-6 years in pre-school educational institutions in cities in 2014, while only 493 places in rural areas. In rural areas, more than half of the children were not able to attend pre-school institutions.

Figure 1. Dynamics of the Number of Places in Pre-School Educational Institutions, per 1,000 Children Aged 1-6 years (%)



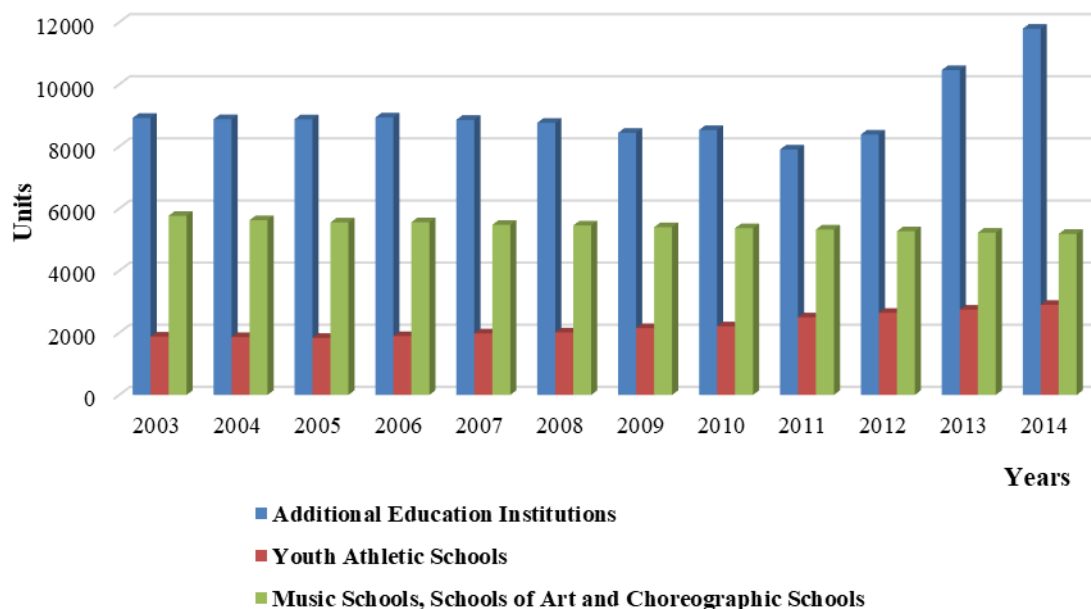
Along with the pre-school institutions, the reduction also affected general education institutions. Through 2003 to 2016 their number decreased by 35.0%. This dynamic was supported by the decrease in the number of students until 2011: from 17.7 million in the academic year 2003/04 to 13.6 million in 2010/11. This was due to the demography when in the period from 1996 to 2001 there was observed a baby boom up to 1.2-1.3 million per year. A freshmen cohort (pupils born between 1996 and 2001) reduced year by year. The birth rates increased in the early 2000s, as well as many students in the academic year 2011/12. In the subsequent years, an annual increase in the number of pupils was recorded, but the number of general education institutions was still decreasing. In the academic year 2015/16, 14.7 million pupils were trained in 42.6 thousand general educational institutions; almost the same number of pupils in the academic year 2006/07 received general education services in more than 60 thousand institutions.

The positive demographic dynamics has been observed in the last seven years: some stable growth in the birth rates and improvement in child mortality indicated the further increase in the number of pupils in general education institutions. Thus, relevant reduction in the number of general education institutions was alarming.

Additional education of children is one of the important elements of education and leisure. Before 2009, the number of additional education institutions had been declining due, to a certain extent, to fertility trends. In 2010, the reduction in the number of institutions had been replaced by the growth, which led to the increase in the number of institutions up to 11.7 thousand by 2014, or by 32.2% compared to 2003 (Figure 2). In the structure of organizations providing additional education

services, the number of institutions of ecological and biological, tourist-local lore, technical, military-patriotic and sports-technical orientation reduced. The number of additional educational institutions was growing mostly due to those whose activities were of a complex nature (e.g., centers for additional education, children's art houses, etc.), as well as sports organizations.

Figure 2. *The Dynamics of Additional Education for Children by Types of Educational Activities, Units*



The number of children involved by the system of additional education increased from 14 to 9% to 9.6 million between 2003 and 2014. This growth was supported by the increasing number of children and the measures aimed at developing the system of additional education (within the framework of the National Strategy for Children).

After 2005, there was a clear trend towards a reduction in the number of institutions for children rest and recovery, which led to a decrease in their number to 46.2 thousand in 2014, i.e. by 12.5%. The number of children who rested in children's health-improving institutions decreased even more dramatically — by 17.3%. There was a situation when during the school holidays many children were unattended (due to professional employment of their parents) and did not participate in any educational and development programs.

Creating a comfortable and friendly environment for families with children and improving the quality of life are inherently linked to the development of health infrastructure. In the healthcare sector, there is a tendency to redistribute services in favor of polyclinics (Table 1). Between 2003 and 2014, the total number of hospital

beds, including the number of beds in hospitals for children, decreased by 20.7% and 22.2%, respectively.

Table 1. *Medical Care for Women and Children*

Years	Total hospital beds, thousand	Number of beds for pregnant and recently delivered women, thousand	Number of beds for children		Number of female counseling centers, child health centers, children's wards, thousand	Number of rural health posts, thousand
			total, thousand	per 10,000 children		
2003	1,596.6	85.0	214.0	96.2	15.3	43.6
2004	1,600.7	83.7	210.4	97.8	15.2	43.2
2005	1,575.4	81.9	200.3	94.7	15.0	43.1
2006	1,559.8	82.3	194.9	93.2	13.5	42.3
2007	1,522.1	82.0	190.2	93.1	11.5	39.8
2008	1,398.5	81.1	191.9	91.0	11.0	39.8
2009	1,373.4	80.5	185.8	86.8	11.0	38.9
2010	1,339.5	80.3	179.0	82.2	17.0	37.8
2011	1,347.1	79.2	178.4	80.4	16.3	35.0
2012	1,332.3	77.4	177.9	66.1	18.4	34.8
2013	1,301.9	74.9	173.9	63.5	17.8	34.8
2014	1,266.8	72.4	166.5	58.7	17.8	35.0

Note: *Russian Statistics Committee, n. d.*

Along with the reduction in the number of beds in hospitals, the number of rural health posts (by 19.7%) mostly located in rural settlements decreased too. At the same time, the number of polyclinics increased. The increase in the number of female counseling centers, child health centers, children's wards from 15.3 thousand to 17.8 thousand (by 16.3%) indicated an increase in the role of preventive and consultative work in the health care system. Improvement of activities in the field of child healthcare, medical care for women and children, implementation of measures aimed at creating child-friendly health care led to a reduction in the level of child mortality (for the period from 2003 to 2014, the death rate of children under the age of 15 years per 100 thousand of children decreased from 128.3 to 89.3).

An important role in providing proper quality of life for families with children and realization of opportunities for family leisure belongs to the sphere of culture: theaters, cinemas, museums, tourist activities. There was an increase in activities of various museums (Table 2). Over the period from 2003 to 2014, the number of museums increased by 22.5%. The largest share in the structure belongs to local history museums (2014 — 51.6%). The number of visits to museums is growing too. The share of visitors under 18 years old in the total number of visitors is about 50%.

Table 2. *Cultural Institutions (as Reported by the Ministry of Culture of Russia)*

Years	Museums in total	Visits to museums, million	Theaters		Spectators, million	Libraries, thousand	Registered library readers, million
			total	including youth theaters			
2003	2,229	73.8	568	158	29.1	50.6	58.9
2004	2,269	74.3	579	164	28.2	49.9	58.2
2005	2,285	75.6	588	165	28	49.5	58.1
2006	2,368	79.2	590	165	28.6	48.3	57.8
2007	2,468	78.8	594	165	29.3	47.5	57.1
2008	2,495	80.8	586	161	30.4	47	57.5
2009	2,539	78.9	601	165	30.2	46.7	56.4
2010	2,578	81	604	170	31	46.1	56
2011	2,631	85.9	618	174	32.9	43.2	53.6
2012	2,687	90.1	643	180	33.9	40.8	52.2
2013	2,727	95.8	658	184	35.8	39.8	51.4
2014	2,731	102.7	661	183	37.2	40.1	51.5

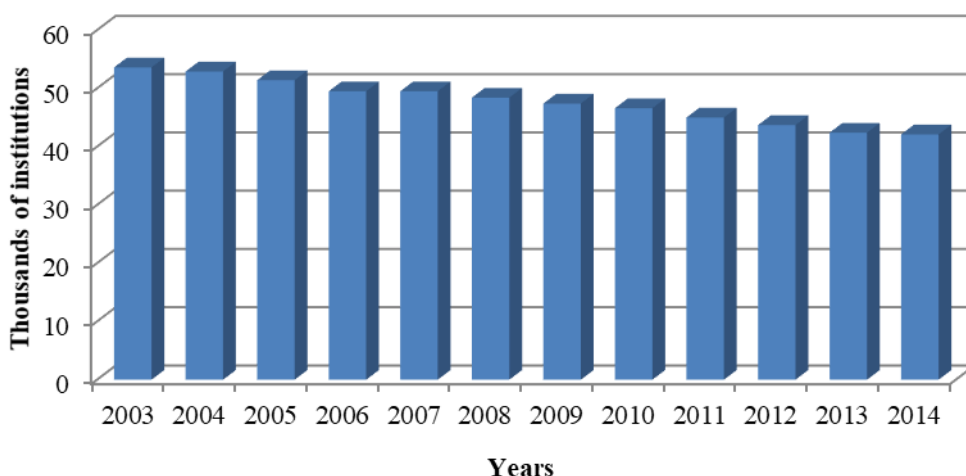
Since 2003, there was an annual increase in the number of theaters, and the number of spectators increased by 27.8%. The number of youth theaters increased too. In recent years, more than half of the events held by the theaters have been those for children, e.g., 57.5% in 2014.

The Russian Federation had about 40 thousand libraries in 2014. Traditional librarian activities (considering the number of libraries, especially in rural areas, and the number of books in library funds) were decreasing due to certain transformation thereof into the electronic ones. The number of library readers and staff was decreasing too. Between 2003 and 2014, the share of libraries equipped with personal computers and libraries with the Internet access increased considerably from 7.8% to 72.9% and from 2.8% to 52.8%, respectively. These trends may be seen in the dynamics of the number of libraries that have electronic catalogs and websites. Though the total number of readers is reducing, the number and proportion of young readers remain at a high level. In recent years, the proportion of children under the age of 14 in the total number of registered library readers has grown by one third registered readers. One of the negative trends is the reduction in the number of institutions of cultural-leisure type (clubs, houses of culture) (Figure 3). From 2003 to 2014 there was observed a reduction in their number in both urban and rural areas by more than 20%.

3.1 Local Infrastructure Estimation According to Relevant Sample Surveys

Notwithstanding the detailed statistics, the situation with accessibility of services of various social infrastructure institutions for families with children is not properly described. The system of statistical accounting does not allow describing a few parameters, for example, the state and development of transport infrastructure and consumer facilities serving families with children, satisfaction with the situation, and the quality of the services provided. All this requires certain selective studies.

Figure 3. Dynamics of the Number of Institutions of Cultural-Leisure Type, Thousand Units



The studies prove that the conditions in which people live and work affect their health status; the life environment in the regions influences the possibility of obtaining education (Bellis 2011; Osipov and Matveeva 2015; Coleman 1966; Mikhaylova *et al.*, 2015; Stroeveva *et al.*, 2015). A comprehensive survey of the population's living conditions (CMPLC) conducted by Rosstat in 2011 and 2014 makes it possible to determine the Russians' satisfaction with their living conditions. The CMPLC is focused on assessments by respondents how the infrastructure is functioning at places of their residence. At the same time, it is possible to obtain monitoring estimates and to compare the results obtained because of regular statistical observations and sample surveys, which do not always coincide. These studies make it possible not only to determine the satisfaction with living standards, housing conditions (Mareeva 2016; Pishnyak and Popova 2015), which has often been the subject of research in various surveys, for example, surveys of household budgets (Researches of Household Budgets in Russia, n. d) or the Russian monitoring of economy and health (the Russian monitoring of economy and health <https://www.hse.ru/rims/spss>), or separate aspects of healthcare or educational institutions' activities.

According to the CMPLC data, in 2014 the share of children under 3 years old who needed to visit pre-school educational institutions decreased to 48.9% (53.4% in 2011). At the same time, as the parents had informed, 51.8% of children under the age of 3 could not attend a nursery or kindergarten in their cities in 2014, and this number was significantly higher than that in rural settlements (40.1%) (Comprehensive Observation of the Population's Life Quality, n.d.). These data were contrary to the ratio of places in pre-school institutions and the number of pre-school children presented above. According to official statistics, the situation in rural areas was much more complicated. This mismatch was probably due to the

peculiarities of the rural mode of life, taking into account the involvement of local community into child minding.

The CMPLC data showed that the situation with territorial accessibility of educational institutions (including additional education) had improved in recent years. Thus, the share of pre-school educational institutions located in the proximity of residence increased in 2011-2014 both in urban areas (from 86.3% to 88.2%) and in rural settlements (from 72.2% to 78.6%). General education institutions were mostly located near the pupils' residence. Both in 2011 and in 2014, more than 80% of all pupils attending general education institutions reached them on foot, spending about 12-13 minutes. In urban settlements, the walking time to general education institutions was 2.5 minutes less on average than that in the rural ones. Currently, the proportion of children whose schools are in a walking distance is approaching 100% (99.4% in urban settlements and 99.0% in rural areas). This allows to state that the parents are satisfied with the territorial accessibility of educational institutions while those are enlarged or reduced in the number.

The share of children involved in sports or active games (from the total number of children aged 3 to 15 years) increased from 47.9% in 2011 to 52.7% in 2014. The share of children regularly attending classes at sports schools increased both in urban areas (from 25.1% in 2011 to 28.8% in 2014) and in rural areas (from 11.4% in 2011 to 19.3% in 2014).

4. Discussion

The CMPLC data prove that 91.7% of respondents like to live in their settlements. At the same time, certain parameters of their local infrastructure are assessed in different ways. First, the state of roads and road safety give rise to unfavorable criticism, i.e. more than half of Russians believe that there are problems in their area of residence (Table 3).

Further, on the degree of prevalence, the problems follow: poor organization of housing and communal services, alcoholism, environmental pollution, certain remoteness of places for recreation and leisure and facilities for physical education and sports, general improper comforts, lack of gardening in their settlements. These problems worry most of the Russians and create a very serious negative background for the lives of households with children in Russian cities and villages.

Table 3. *Problems in the Place of Residence of Respondents (the Share of Respondents Who Noted the Presence of Certain Problems), %*

Problems in the locality	Percentage (%) who noted the problem
Improper roads and road safety	56.3
Poor organization of housing and communal services	38.0
Alcoholism	36.1
Environmental pollution	34.6

Remoteness of places of rest and leisure	32.2
Remoteness of facilities for physical education and sports	30.2
General lack of landscaping and gardening	29.0
Remoteness of cultural institutions	25.6
Poor organization of public transport	23.6
Inaccessibility of state and municipal medical services	23.0
Drugs	19.6
Remoteness of pharmacies	18.7
Vandalism (deliberate destruction in public places and houses)	17.9
Inaccessibility of state and municipal pre-school and school educational services	10.9
High level of crime (public order violations)	10.6
Remoteness of outlets	10.4

It should be noted that the problems related to the infrastructure functioning in their localities are referred to the most important ones by respondents with children against the entire population. Numerous problems for parents with children are more pressing. The residents of urban and rural areas with children are very different in assessing problems at their localities. However, the differences are not observed for all aspects analyzed during the sample survey. The statistically significant differences are revealed by the parameters presented in Table 4. In some cases, the sharpness of some problem is reported in the city, in others — in the countryside. The distribution of responses of urban and rural respondents is very different, which confirms our calculations using the Pearson's coefficients. Townsmen are more concerned with lack of consumer services near their houses, environmental pollution, drugs, trade services, vandalism and high crime.

In contrast, rural residents with children are more often dissatisfied with certain remoteness of places for recreation and leisure and facilities for physical education and sports, poor organization of public transport, inaccessibility of state and municipal medical, pre-school and school educational services, and greater remoteness of pharmacies and outlets. Such differences are due to the peculiarities of living modes in urban and rural areas.

Table 4. *Assessment of Problems by Respondents with Children, %*

Problems in the locality	City	Village	The Pearson's coefficient	Asymptotic standard error
Poor consumer services	38.6	20.6	0.317	0.018
Environmental pollution	34.6	22.9	0.119	0.017
Remoteness of places of rest and leisure	32.9	53.2	0.195	0.017
Remoteness of facilities for physical education and sports	28.3	52.2	0.235	0.018
Drugs	22.3	9.0	0.163	0.015
Poor trade services	19.1	12.4	0.144	0.019
Vandalism (deliberate destruction in public places and houses)	18.6	6.6	0.161	0.014
Poor organization of public transport	16.7	34.9	0.205	0.018

Inaccessibility of state and municipal medical services	11.9	27.2	0.193	0.018
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5. Conclusion

Establishing the developed infrastructure of childhood is the most important condition for achieving the goals of sustainable development, increasing access to quality education and upbringing, and cultural development of children. The following factors influence the development of the infrastructure of institutions providing services to children and families with children:

- Growth of the number of children because of the increase in the birth rate in recent years will lead to a further increase in the need for the services of social infrastructure of childhood.
- The main trend in the coming years is the integration of information and communication technologies in the traditional environment, which affect the organization of activities in the provision of services to families and children.
- Raising the level of education of the population and the requirements for the education system.
- Increasing the labor hours and, therefore, increasing the need for child minding and pedagogical services.
- Increasing the value of health, creating the strategies for self-supporting behavior, increased attention to health services, leisure and sports.

This study has proven that the estimates given by respondents living in urban and rural areas are much less different from the statistics for the relevant institutions. Obviously, this is because of the role played by a different attitude to the quality and volumes of the provided services as estimated by urban and rural residents. A rather serious reduction of institutions providing services to families with children in health, education and leisure has not yet been estimated negatively by the respondents.

Most urban residents are concerned about the quality of consumer services, environmental pollution, certain remoteness of places of rest, as well as facilities for physical education and sports. In rural areas, the main problems for residents are certain remoteness of places for recreation, physical education and sports, as well as poor transportation and unavailability of medical services. The social infrastructure should be developed according to the needs and wishes of the citizens.

To obtain comprehensive assessments that determine the families' satisfaction with their living conditions, it is necessary to monitor surveys of target groups. Note that when integrating information from different sources, a more reliable and complete assessment of the development of social infrastructure for families with children has been obtained. In our opinion, the comprehensive monitoring of the population's living conditions should be conducted on a regular basis, with targeted cohorts, to

obtain representative data for each of the regions of Russia in the context of the surveyed categories.

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